



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department Of Agriculture Rural Development
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USDA Rural Development Energy and Value-Added Grant Opportunities

Scottsbluff, Neb., Jan. 5, 2006 –Ag producers and small businesses are encouraged to attend the January 18th, 1:30 p.m. MST informational meeting to discuss energy and value-added opportunities available via the Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements grant and Value-Added Producer Grant programs. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development will conduct the meeting in conjunction with Northwest Rural Public Power District's load management meeting at 5613 Hwy 87 in Hay Springs.

Meeting is highly recommended to agricultural producers, agricultural producer groups, farm and ranch cooperatives and majority controlled producer-based business ventures for use in value-added agriculture projects and for ag producers and small businesses who are wanting to apply for energy type projects. Attendees will become familiar with both the energy and value-added program eligibility requirements and will be guided through the application processes.

Value-added producer grants may be used to fund one of the following two: (1) planning activities needed to establish a viable value-added marketing opportunity for an agricultural product (e.g. conduct a feasibility study, develop a business or marketing plan); or (2) acquire working capital to operate a value-added business venture that will allow producers to better compete in domestic and international markets.

Energy grants can be utilized for a wide range of projects; such as irrigation projects, motor upgrades, HVAC, lighting, windows/doors, insulation and a variety of other energy saving projects as well as wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, hydrogen renewable projects. Residential improvements are not eligible.

Statewide, \$418,348 in energy grants were awarded in Fiscal Year 2005 assisting in 36 energy efficiency improvements projects and 1 renewable energy. Value-added grants totaling \$1,113,540 assisted 16 producers in value-added ventures. The 2002 Farm Bill made available monies for both the USDA Rural Development Energy Efficiency Improvements and Renewable Energy Systems Grant program and the Value-Added Producer Grant program. Since the beginning of these programs, Nebraska has received nearly \$778,000 for 57 energy projects and over \$7.7 million assisting in 54 value-added ventures.

For further information contact Timothy Brooks, rural development manager, USDA Rural Development, (308) 632-2195 x102 or timothy.brooks@ne.usda.gov; or Les Tlustos or Roland Skinner, Northwest Rural PPD, (308) 638-4445.

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